

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural) [5.11 pm]: Part of the commitment that this government has shown to regional Western Australia —

The PRESIDENT: Order! Two members are standing between the Chair and the member on his feet. That, as members should know, is unacceptable.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Part of the commitment that this government has shown to regional Western Australia can be best exemplified, I think, by the fact that \$22.29 million is going to be used by the Minister for Health to ensure and strengthen cancer services in regional Western Australia, including in areas such as Albany, Northam, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie. I guess we have all known people who suffered from cancer—I certainly have—in regional Western Australia. I have known of the pain they have gone through and the effort that they have made to go to some of these areas to receive their chemotherapy. In fact, a very good friend of mine a number of years ago was in this unfortunate situation and went to Northam on occasions but on other occasions had to come to Perth, and the time and distance travelled between Northam and Perth was almost too much for that person to bear. I sincerely endorse this initiative by the Minister for Health, Dr Kim Hames. It is something that is well overdue.

This government's spending in regional Western Australia is quite outstanding. As I said, it is well over \$1 billion. Part of that spending is meeting Liberal Party election commitments, which includes Nickol Bay Hospital in Karratha. Some \$150 million will be spent there over the next five years refurbishing and redeveloping the hospital. Of course, in the same vein, \$15 million will be spent over the next three years for the Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital redevelopment. That will have a total cost of \$55.8 million once construction is completed. I believe it commenced in March 2009. Albany has been crying out for years for a new hospital. The Labor government, in its tenure as the government of Western Australia, refurbished Albany Regional Hospital at some expense to taxpayers, but the Liberal Party made an election commitment that it would replace the hospital, and \$61 million over the next three years will be spent on the development of the new hospital, with a total cost of \$166 million once the hospital is completed in 2012.

In October last year, I organised a trip for the Premier. That trip commenced at Katanning and moved up to Narrogin and finished in York. While the Premier was in Narrogin, we met at the aged-care facility with the board of the aged-care facility and discussed a number of issues. Once again, it is most encouraging to see that this government is spending money to ensure that five new respite homes will be built throughout regional Western Australia, including one in the Wheatbelt town of Narrogin. That respite care home came out of discussions with the Premier at the time. Aged care, quite frankly, is a real issue in regional Western Australia. I might digress a bit, because it is actually a federal issue, but I would hope that this state government takes on board the fact that aged-care facilities in regional Western Australia do need funding. It is totally inappropriate that people in aged care who have resided in districts for many, many years are at times forced to spend the last days of their life elsewhere. From a metropolitan perspective, I do not think that anybody in that situation in the metropolitan area would expect their elderly parents to have to go and live in, say, Gnowellen. I think it needs addressing from a state perspective as well.

Some \$4.8 million is being expended through this budget on wild dog management and addressing issues on the state barrier fence. Pastoral areas are not my domain—they are more for Hon Ken Baston, Hon Norman Moore and Hon Wendy Duncan—but wild dogs have been a significant issue for many, many years. The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Terry Redman, has addressed this. Obviously, there is funding in this budget to ensure that pastoralists will have money and doggers will do their best to track wild dogs, which are an absolute menace. There is anecdotal evidence of these animals actually tracking people. Unless this is addressed, and it is being addressed in this budget, an occasion could arise when somebody is significantly harmed by a pack of wild dogs. It would detrimentally affect our tourist trade if that were to happen, because nowadays more and more people are travelling through pastoral areas and are unaware of some of the dangers that exist out there. There is also the livestock issue. We now have sheep that are worth well over \$100 each and they are a significant asset. Many pastoralists cannot currently run sheep because the wild dogs decimate them and kill them wholesale. Hopefully, this initiative by the Minister for Agriculture and Food will have some effect.

There are many things in this budget. As I said previously, over \$1 billion is to be expended by this Liberal-led government in regional Western Australia. One of the things that is close to my area is of course Indian Ocean Drive, which was commenced by the Court government when the road from Jurien Bay to Cervantes was completed. It then fell into a bit of a hole under the Labor government and was revitalised only during its

last 18 months of government. The road from Cervantes to Lancelin is due for completion early next year. It will be opened by the Premier and the Minister for Transport, Hon Simon O'Brien. It is a significant road. I had the opportunity to travel on it four months ago. It will be a great drive for metropolitan people to travel up the Mid West coast as far as Geraldton and then out of Geraldton up to Northampton and rejoin the road up to Kalbarri. It is intended to be a tourist drive and, hopefully, it will take a fair bit of tourist traffic off Brand Highway, which is now virtually a heavy haulage route. One of the great advantages of course, once Indian Ocean Drive is completed, is that for people residing in Jurien Bay, for example, it will take 30 minutes less to drive to the metropolitan area. They will not have to spend 30 minutes accessing Brand Highway, but rather they can come straight down the coast to Lancelin and come through the metropolitan area via the northern suburbs. It is an outstanding result. It has been a Liberal Party commitment for many, many years. In fact, previous members Bill McNee and Garry Snook talked about this on many occasions and how it would enhance all the Mid West coast from a tourism perspective. It is a great example of the government taking on board the local requirements.

Of course, along with that is \$450 000 of improvements to the Indian Ocean Drive intersection with Gingin Brook Road and Caraban Road. This road is going to be used quite extensively once it has opened. I assume that traffic at times would be quite heavy. The Minister for Transport has ensured that this intersection is made as safe as possible through this budget. There is \$28 million of ongoing funding through the Regional Airports Development scheme. If members were to go to Wagin airport, they would see one example of where RADS is building a facility at the airport, which will help Royal Flying Doctor Service transfers from local areas and local hospitals. On previous occasions transfers took place from ambulances in the open air and, on occasions, in rain or extreme heat. The intention of this building is to avoid transfers taking place in those conditions. It will also be used by the many people in aircraft who drop in for the Wagin Woolorama, who will be able to wait undercover.

Something also very close to my heart is the fact that this government, through the Department of Transport, will ensure that all new school buses are fitted with air conditioning and automatic transmission. Existing school buses with a remaining service life of at least 10 years and that have entered into service within the past five years will be retrofitted and will have air conditioning installed at a cost of \$10.9 million over four years. Most members from regional Western Australia who have spent many hours of their life travelling in school buses—I am sure Hon Max Trenorden will be one of those members—will be fully aware of how it feels to travel at 3.30 or four o'clock in the afternoon in temperatures of 38 or 40 degrees. Air-conditioned buses will certainly ensure that the trip home will be a much more pleasant experience.

Hon Max Trenorden: Less the dust.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Exactly.

State development expenditure in this budget includes \$16.5 million over four years for the Oakajee Port and Rail project. The Oakajee port will open up the Mid West significantly. It will enhance the viability of towns such as Morawa and Mullewa, and the mining enterprises there will thrive if they overcome the Rudd government's super tax on profits greater than six per cent. The rail system will also improve the transport requirements of that large grain growing area. That is a great initiative.

In the energy budget \$47.1 million has been allocated to the 330-kilovolt line from Pinjar to Eneabba and a 330-kilovolt terminal at Three Springs, which will enable the connection of the Gindalbie-Karara mine site, which is one of the mine sites I talked about earlier. The provision of energy is a significant requirement in this area of the state. It needs to be increased so that private enterprise developments along that coastline can go ahead once Indian Ocean Drive opens up to enable a lifestyle similar to that in the metropolitan area. At present the lack of electricity is limiting some of those developments. Once this 330-kilovolt line has been installed, it will go a long way to alleviating that problem.

I will close, as I opened, by saying that having \$1 billion spent in regional Western Australia by a Liberal-led government is an outstanding achievement. The fact that the state's budget is in surplus—a minor surplus, nonetheless a surplus—in a \$22 billion state budget is an outstanding achievement. This has come about through hard work and commitment by various ministers to ensure that this state has a very good chance of retaining its AAA credit rating. Hopefully, the world financial crisis will dissipate somewhat and next year I can be standing in this place talking about a budget surplus that is even greater than it is today.

Hon Liz Behjat: As long as you don't get an RSPT.

Hon JIM CHOWN: Correct. That will, of course, depend on who wins the federal election and the outcome of the mining super tax, for want of a better term, and whether it is agreed to by both the House of Representatives and the Senate, should the Labor Party win the election. That outcome is up in the air at the moment. If that took place, of course, mining royalties would go straight to the federal government and be reimbursed to the states.

That would have a severely negative impact on any government of this state, whether it be Liberal or Labor, in trying to ensure that the surplus is maintained. We understand totally that the federal government is more than happy to take taxes away from Western Australia while being more than reticent to repay them.

I will close by saying that the 68c we receive as our portion of the GST, which will decline over the next three to four years, reflects a loss of income for this state government of at least \$2.7 billion. Regardless of that, I will say once again that this government has been able to maintain its budget surplus.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Ed Dermer**.